

The Catholic Journal

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CHRISTMAS BELLS

Ring out the merry Christmas chime,
Proclaim the message far and near,
Peace and good will in every clime,
To rich and poor sweet Christmas cheer.

Loudly proclaim o'er land and sea
What love divine for men did plan,
The setting of the captive free,
The nobler brotherhood of man.

Success of grief to those that mourn,
Rest to the weary, heaven to win,
A fuller life beyond death's hours
To such as seek to enter in.

Peal forth with no uncertain tone
That love leaves none beneath the ban,
And they alone are blessed that own
Their duty to their fellow man.

Proclaim as loudly as ye can
The tidings glad to old and young,
Peace upon earth, good will to men,
First by the angel chorists sung.

NEIL MACDONALD.

DICK HUNT'S LUCK.

A CHRISTMAS STORY BY EDITH SESSIONS TURNER

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"Tain't no use," he muttered, "tain't no durned airthly use ter try ter be decent. A man might just as well be an ornery cuss and done with it. A decent feller don't never git on in this world. It's only mean, low-down, outrageous cattle that gets on."

After this outburst Dick Hunt sat down in his log cabin door and fixed his eyes on the lofty wall of mountains rising, inexorable as fate, before time. Peak after peak lifted its haughty, pine-crowned head into the sapphire sky. In the cold light of the December afternoon glittered the drifting wreaths of snow about their bold, defiant brows. Joy, remote, pitiless, terrible, they frowned down upon the man who sat



"THROW UP YOUR HANDS!"

there alone, wondering in his dumb, helpless rage what it all meant—why he couldn't "git on" as other men did. Dick Hunt's ill luck had become proverbial in the San Juan country. "As cursed onlucky as Dick Hunt" was a comparison often bandied about in saloons and eating houses. Every dweller in that region knew the silent, lonely man who had lived for years in the desolate cabin on the windswept side of Lost Chances gulch, close by Ophir trail. Everybody laughed at him for a vision ary. Dick had spent ten years locating claims. The mountains were marked with his signposts, rude, wooden crosses, each in turn marking a fresh grave of his hopes.

Dick saw other men prosper—"tin horn" gamblers, who cheated the miners out of their dearly earned wages; dancehouse proprietors in the camps who grew rich out of the blood and tears of wretched women; scamps, vagabonds, blacklegs succeeded where he failed—he who had always tried to lead a decent life and do the "square thing" by his fellows.

"What's the meaning of it?" he demanded furiously of the mountains, his only companions, his only friends. But the mountains turned, as ever, their solemn, sphinxlike faces toward him and made no answer.

Strange, wild thoughts came to men in solitude. It is not good for man to be alone. And so poor, disheartened, lonely Dick Hunt, away up there near timber line, in that tremendous, appalling wilderness, wild thoughts came trooping these days, thrusting their seductive faces close to his and indicating with tempting fingers a downward path.

Money—money—was what Dick wanted. He was tired of digging and delving for the gold which ever beckoned and allured and then mockingly vanished at the sound of his pick and shovel.

There are other ways to get money besides working like a dog all your days. Dick had heard the ways and means canvassed too many times not to be well up in details. Had he not rubbed elbows many a night with men whose lips could tell tales of violence and plunder and afterward comparative ease? Those fellows did not toil in the mountains year in and out, enduring all sorts of privations and hardships. Not they. They lived in Silverton and other camps and were feared and respected of men. There was Shorty Young, for instance. Everybody knew he was a thug and a cutthroat. Did anybody have any doubts about his being the leader of the gang that robbed the Esplanade stage and shot the driver in cold blood? Of course not. And Shorty Young was a power in the San Juan country.

There were Tony Drew and Jere Burkhardt. Everybody knew that Tony was a "tin horn" gambler, and yet because he was always flush he was a favorite and had a mighty soft time of it. And Jere Burkhardt had shot an inoffensive Chinaman, and yet see how he got on! No, there was no use in being square. It didn't pay, after all, into dusk, and on by the cold, white, glittering stars swung out above the cold, white, glittering peaks. Then the pale moon slowly drifted up from behind the mountain ramparts and sent a flood of light down Lost Chances gulch and athwart the Ophir trail.

And Dick Hunt looked down the trail and saw again that alluring, beckoning, seductive procession toiling maddeningly fast in the moonlight and heard their diabolical whisperings: "Why work any more? Why not take the shortest, surest way to fortune? Fortune is coming up the Ophir trail to you. Seize her, capture her, hold her by her throat and compel her to be yours."

"By God, that's what I'll do!" said Dick Hunt.

He rose, went into his cabin and lighted his lamp, the lamp which many a night had been a beacon to the slight, delicate boy who carried the mail across the mountains over the Ophir trail. Dick had always liked that lad. Someway, when he had seen him riding by on his sure-footed, plodding, patient little burro; when the rider had looked up to the cabin and swung his sombrero to the lonely miner, Dick had caught in the mirror of the postboy's personality some fleeting, ghostly shadow of his own lost youth. Glimpses of days long dead, days when life had been one vast possibility; when hope had shone not like an ignis fatuus, but like a signal fire on a mountain top; when all the world had been his, flashed before him. He had come to look for the boy's approach as an event. He liked to hear his cheery whistle and halloo, to answer back somewhat, good-natured greeting, and then to watch him climb the range—farther, farther, a speck, out of sight. He felt an interest in the young chap almost as if he belonged to him. He had grown into his life, as it were.

And tonight he had made up his mind to murder him!

Yes, that was the only way to get anything in this blasted country. He had plodded like a burro just long enough. He knew that Jack Fanchot, the postman, would carry next morning the weekly mail over the range. He knew, moreover, that there would be several thousand dollars in the mailbag—Christmas presents that lucky prospectors were sending away to their friends. He smiled grimly as he thought that certain people would wait long for their Christmas presents this year. By nightfall he would be in Silverton, and then—

He had no definite plan. The lust for gold had simply overpowered him. His only impulse was to steal, kill and get away. Dick Hunt was for the moment a madman.

Of course there would be no difficulty in managing the boy. Dick was twice his size and then coming upon him and surprising him—oh, yes, it would be dead easy! All this while he was eating his hasty supper and clearing away the table for operations. He cleaned and reloaded his six shooters and put them under his flabby pillows. Then, taking a piece of coarse white cloth, he constructed a frightfully grotesque mask and crammed it in the pocket of the coat he meant to wear on the morrow. When his ghastly preparations were finished, he lay down and slept.

He awakened at daylight, got up, cooked his bacon and flapjacks, made his coffee and tried to eat. But somehow the food stuck in his throat. After breakfast he buckled on his belt and pistols, put on the long coat he brought from the east ten years back, drew his slouch hat well down over his restless, fiery eyes, and with the stealthy tread of a wild beast crept through the cedars and pines down the trail.

When Jack Fanchot came whistling up the trail, leading his heavily laden burro and striking listlessly with his whip at the sagebrush, he was suddenly confronted by a masked man who sternly ordered him to throw up his hands. Hesitating an instant, a blow stretched him almost senseless on the ground. As in a hideous dream, he saw the man stoop over him and with deliberate aim at his temple with a six shooter.

But he did not shoot. He suddenly passed, and almost with a groan said aloud, "No, hang me if I kin do it." Then, taking a coil of rope from his pocket, the robber tied the half-conscious boy to a tree, rendering him



utterly powerless to move. "I kin finish the job later," he muttered as with a vicious jab of his knife he ripped open the mailbag.

Dick Hunt quickly found the packages for which he was looking, and with an inarticulate sound thrust them in his pockets. He was about dropping the bag when he saw something which made him start.

Starting up at him from the pile of letters in the bag was his own name traced in a feeble, old-fashioned hand. The sight of that handwriting almost stopped his heart. With a mighty effort he lifted the cheap yellow envelope and broke it open. The letter ran:

MY DEAR DICK—I cannot sleep for thinking of my son so far away. If there be a so many long, dreary days since I heard from my Dick, my son, some home in a glad day ere before I die. I am very for him. I do not think I can live many years, I must see you one more. Never mind if you are not rich. Never mind if you have not succeeded in securing a great fortune. I love you just as much.

YOUR MOTHER.

The terrified boy, bound to the tree and watching his enemy through languid eyelids, expecting death every moment, saw a strange sight. The masked robber suddenly sank upon the ground, bowed his head upon his hands and burst into tears. A very storm of sobs shook his stalwart frame for a few seconds, and then there was silence.

What did Dick Hunt see? A little moss-grown, weather-beaten farmhouse way off in northern Illinois, morning glories climbing over the side porch and peeping in at the window, by whose side sat a woman, plain, old, wrinkled, waiting alone for the son who went away to seek his fortune and never came back.

He, the robber, the murderer, the coward, had one friend on earth who had not forgotten him, and who loved him "just as much" as if he were rich and powerful.

With a groan Dick Hunt rushed suddenly, replaced the packages in the mailbag, went over to the wondering boy, released him and said gently: "My boy, I was right pious on the road to hell, but an angel spoke to me. Forgive me of ye kin. I'm goin ter put myself up ter the law's quick as yer a mind ter. Only 'twill break one poor old woman's heart," and then Dick Hunt, thief, transformed into Dick Hunt, hero, took of his mask and stood with a humble, deprecating air before his boyish judge.

"Good God, Hunt, was it you?" cried the lad. "Why, man, I thought you were my friend!"

"I were," said Dick very gently, "I were. I reckon I went clean plumb crazy last night."

"Was that letter from your mother?" asked Jack.

"It were," said Dick. "She—she'd like ter hev me come home, but that's for you ter say whether I'll go."

"Shut up, you fool!" said the boy, laughing and holding out a trembling hand. "Of course yer'll go. I won't give you away. Let me see. I'll fix up some yarn. I'll say the burro brayed and scared the road agent off. Go home, of course! Be thankful you've got a home to go to. Go spend Christmas with your mother."

Dick Hunt raised his haggard face and looked at the boy. He tried to speak, but the words would not come.

"What is it, Hunt?" asked Jack. "Make up your mind to go the way you want. If that's what's bothering you, here, I've got a little something for you."

room. The man next one hundred of rights over the earth he was leaving. It trembled across the porch of the old, weather-beaten farmhouse, through the window, and glimmered like a halo about the gray head bowed in anguish to the dreary, lonely room. The sorrowing woman lifted her head and moved her lips as in prayer.

Suddenly a step rang up the walk; there was a knock at the door; it opened; some one—a tall, sunburned, rough man—entered. He passed on instantly at the sight of the little, slender, trembling figure which turned to the chair as he entered, at the wretched old face down which the tears were falling, then fell on his knees at his mother's feet and buried his head in her lap, while her thin hands fastened over him in benediction and her voice broken by sobs murmured: "For this my son, was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

Was there ever another such Christmas as that of Dick Hunt and his old mother? He could not find the slightest table with sufficient testimony. Dick had not long enough love and tenderness on his mother. And after the feast was over and the two had drawn their chairs up to the roaring fire, while Dick lighted his pipe, his mother eyed him closely and at last said: "Oh, Dick, my son, God has been so good to me in giving you back I ought not to have one selfish thought. But still I cannot help thinking that it will only be for a little while that you will love and marry and leave me."

"Mother," said Dick earnestly, "if he laid down his pipe, and turning toward her took her hand in his, 'I shall never marry. I shall stay with you as long as you live and make you as comfortable as I can. Then I shall go back to my son out west.'"

"Your son?" gasped the old lady.

"Yes, my son—my adopted son, mother."

"Adopted, Dick?"

"Yes, mother. His name is Jack Fanchot, and he carries the mail night by my cabin over Ophir trail."

DIOCESAN NEWS.

From Our Special Correspondent.

Branch 46, C. N. R. A. held its annual election Thursday, Dec. 14th, and elected the following officers: President, M. Cogan; Vice-President, H. McHugh; and Vice-President, James Winters; Recording Secretary, O. P. Colvin; Assistant Recording Secretary, James Harty; Treasurer, James Ticker; Marshal, H. I. Brown; Guard, P. Dwyer; Trustees, for two years, J. O'Connor, T. Brennan, W. McGrath. The election was very quiet—not the old-time strife of the

Palmer.

Eliza Frank was found dead in her home near St. Ann's cemetery Tuesday. Frank had evidently been dead some hours. The body lay in such a manner as to obstruct the door, which was forced open by moving the remains to one side. Dr. Sprague was summoned and on inquiry was held Wednesday afternoon at two o'clock.

A very delightful surprise was given last night when the ladies of the St. Ann's society gave a party at the home of Mrs. May McIntyre and Miss May McIntyre. The decorations were of red and white. The program of the evening was given by Miss May McIntyre and Mr. J. J. Fitz of Rochester. Among the guests from out of town were Miss Briggs of Clinton Springs, Miss Driscoll of New York, and J. J. Fitz of Rochester.

James Motes has been granted the original patent.

Michael, Driscoll of Rochester is to be married to a young woman of the same name.

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